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ABSTRACT

This paper, written from the perspectives of indigenous Maori and Tongan researchers, critiques the Auckland Secondary Schools Principals Association's (ASSPA) perspective that culture disrupts students' schooling. It discusses the relations of schooling to the cultural and political forces inside and outside of school; the relations of indigenous students to their own community and environment. It examines how the ASSPA protects and supports the relationship of schools in shaping culture and politics and how the ASSPA and schooling can be infused with new insights, perspectives, philosophies, and approaches through practices that traverse cultural and political relationships. The paper presents a theoretical framework called "Po Talanoa," which is empowering and gratifying to indigenous people because it does not limit their capacity to understand the complexity and richness of the indigenous cultural milieu. The framework facilitates understanding of the relationships of schooling in promoting and hindering the development of internal strength, feeling at home within the educational environment, and transforming cultural and political relationships that reflect ideas, perspectives, interests, and activities of the ASSPA. The paper asserts that schooling is a political act and that schooling should be a partnership in which both the school and the indigenous peoples are aware and proud of their language and cultural practices. (SM)

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Toward conceptualising cultural diversity. An Indigenous critique

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Toward conceptualising cultural diversity.
An Indigenous critique

Abstract

The idea for this paper arose from a column entitled "Culture disrupts schooling" in a suburban newspaper. In the column, the issues and concerns of the Chairperson of the Auckland Secondary Schools Principals Association (ASSPA) about the students who take part in the ASB Secondary Schools Maori and Pacific Islands Cultural Festival are emphasized. Since its inception in 1976, the festival has produced claims from the principals, among others, which *distort, devalue,* and *disrupt* the language and culture of 'indigenous' students. Even though, the students practise their dances and songs after school hours, during the lunch break and the weekend claims by the principals that the 'students spend too much class time practising for cultural performances,' that 'rehearsals for the event are disruptive' and 'effect their schooling,' continue to be produced by them.

This presentation is an 'indigenous' critique of the ASSPA's perspective that 'culture disrupts schooling' for the students. The most crucial issue raised is that of the relation of schooling to the cultural and political forces inside and outside school, the relations of 'indigenous' students to their own community and environment. Thus, two sides of one question are discussed: how the ASSPA protects and supports the relationship of schools in shaping culture and politics and, how the ASSPA and schooling can be infused with new insights, perspectives, philosophies, and approaches through practices that traverse cultural and political relationships. In doing so, a theoretical framework called *Pō Talanoa* that is empowering and gratifying to 'indigenous' peoples is presented. That is, a framework that does not limit their capacity to understand the complexity and richness of the 'indigenous' cultural milieux will be posited. It is a framework enabling them to understand the relationships of schooling in promoting and hindering the development of internal strength, 'feeling at home' within the educational environment, and the capacity to transform cultural and political relationships that reflect ideas, perspectives, interests, and activities of the ASSPA.

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This article is written from the perspectives of both an indigenous *Mäori* and an indigenous *Tongan* researcher, so, ways of understanding the term 'indigenous' are addressed. The next section queries the historical, social, economic and political capacity of schooling in terms of the important concepts of 'culture'. Finally, the theoretical framework called *Pö Talanoa* will be presented. The central thesis is that schooling ought to be a partnership in which both the school and 'indigenous' peoples, aware and proud of their own language and cultural practices, represent the force for creating a richer pedagogical environment. The words *distort, devalue,* and *disrupt* are highlighted in the first paragraph because they are important in understanding the position taken in this paper. Thus, the view of this paper is that schooling is a political act not a neutral one.

The indigenous milieux.
Maori? Tongan? New Zealand European/Pälangi?

From the outset, it is important to shed light on how the term 'indigenous' is appropriated in the discussion in order to understand the relations of 'indigenous' students to his or her community and environment. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* Linda Smith has argued that the term indigenous is a relatively recent one and it 'internationalises' the ordeals and the problems of some of the world's *colonized* people.[1] In an attempt to avoid collectivising the many distinct societies whose mind, spirit and body have been disrupted by a colonising society, the term is used here to refer specifically to Mäori who have been subjected to settlement of the mind, spirit, body and, land by a colonising society in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Also, it refers to the migrants from the Kingdom of Tonga whose specific way of thinking and quality of life are shaped by a colonising society, even after it has left the tropical islands to the north. Of course, Mäori and Tongan people cannot escape from their own language, assumptions, histories, sacred traditions, sacred ceremonies, ancestors, kin affiliations, beliefs, values, responsibilities, obligations and, challenges.

The connections and interactions between the mind, spirit and body play an important part in understanding the term indigenous. The mind refers to the 'mindscapes' or ways of thinking

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about people (kin relations based on common descent) and place (which includes sacred dwellings, sacred mountains, sacred waterways, sacred sites, and so forth).[2] The spirit is related to the most deep passions for ancestors and deities in whom a person believes, values, dreams about, and to whom s/he is committed. The body, in turn, is connected with the person's decisions and activities. Indigenously, then, the term can be characterised by the balance of the body, mind and spirit; relationships and renewal; acknowledgement of the ancestors, spirits, or, deities that activate the world around them. From this point of view, indigeneity is coming to understand that all life is living and filled with meaning.

It is instructive to note that it might be considered odd by some fourth, fifth, and sixth generation New Zealand European/Pālangi people to envision Tongan migrants as indigenous people in Aotearoa. Therefore we turn to the important contribution of linguistics to clarify the idea.[3] While Māori culture was produced in Aotearoa and most of what Māori believed about their changed lived experience was indigenous knowledge formed in Aotearoa-New Zealand, their language had no contact with other languages because these first settlers remained isolated from their island homeland (meaning region) in the Pacific Ocean for centuries. It is not a matter of geographical distance, though, that is important to understanding how the term indigenous is used here, but, the idea that Tongan and Māori (among others) descend from a common linguistic ancestor. That is, the languages belong to the same subgroup of Austronesian, in this case Polynesia. In addition, the traditional stories that Māori, as descendants of the first people of Aotearoa are now known, brought with them are the same as those told, for example, in Tonga. The idea that languages change is in itself neither particularly remarkable nor useful to this discussion. The interest lies in the notion that the ubiquitous and powerful influence promoted by perceptions of cultural rupture signal that Māori and Tongan peoples' knowledge of songs, poetry and dance: and the peoples' conceptual and linguistic ways of organising knowledge remain in danger of being disrupted on stage and in school. Thus, the suggestion is that it is the impacts of disruption on Tongan and Māori languages, literature, dances, songs and ceremonial dramas that 'internationalises' the indigenous relationship between them.

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This also brings up the problem: What shall New Zealand European/Pälangi people who might legitimately want to claim some kind of indigenous status in Aotearoa be called? As Smith puts it, the term has been co-opted politically by descendants of European settlers who lay claim to an indigenous identity through their occupation and settlement of land over several generations or simply through being born in Aotearoa. This conveys some sense of people who belong to the country but they tend not to actively struggle as a society for the protection of Mäori and Tongan languages, knowledges and cultures, or support the self-determination of Mäori whose forbears once occupied the land they have settled. New Zealand European/Pälangi people's linguistic and cultural homeland is somewhere else; their cultural loyalty is to some other place, the United Kingdom, for example. They are a reflection of the fact that the first disruptive contacts in Aotearoa were with people, generally white men, who subscribed to a fairly uniform set of beliefs about language, society, property, government and religion passed on through schooling and the work force. This conveys the sense of people who belong to Aotearoa but do not share the experiences as people who have been subjected to the disruption of their body, mind and spirit. From this point of view, it is clear that New Zealand European/Pälangi people are not considered indigenous in this discussion.

This being the case, culture cannot be more or less the same for everyone because the inevitable selection of knowledge, experiences, and skills for schooling and the work force occurs over a terrain of different people and their places. The point being made is that different people from different places conceptualise culture in different ways. It should be emphasized that the term is problematic, complex, but irreplaceable to a discussion of performing arts, schooling and cultural diversity. In the interests of conceptual clarity and to diminish the risk of misunderstandings, the critical ideas of Thomas J. Sergiovanni, Paulo Freire, Maria de la Luz Reyes and Alison Jones: Ana Maui Taufe'ulungaki, Kabini Sanga, Manu Aluli Meyer, Konai Helu Thaman, among other indigenous educators, are drawn upon to shed light on what culture can and ought to mean in school.[4]

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In discussing how the ASSPA protects and supports the relationship of schools in shaping culture and politics, it is worth referring to the ideas depicted in Thomas J. Sergiovanni's text, *Moral Leadership*.[5] According to Sergiovanni, the 'managerial mystique' represents the dominant 'world view' of management theory and practice and is reflected in the curricula of schooling, among other institutions. For the most part, the managerial mystique is biased toward rationality, logic, neutrality, the importance of self-interest, individuality, a notion of time as linear, sequential and irreversible and, assimilation. Emphasizing these values means dismissing emotions, passions, and morality; devaluing the importance of group membership and a sense of belonging to a place; distorting the notion of time as part of the whole environment of living; disrupting the languages, responsibilities and obligations of the indigenous milieu as important qualities. There is a tendency, then, to focus knowledge, attention, and skills so narrowly that principals and teachers have become incapable of thinking and acting beyond prescribed information, skills and roles.

Maria de la Luz Reyes challenges widely accepted assumptions that undergird and guide schooling for linguistically different students in her claim that the practice is:

> *"similar to the 'one size fits all' marketing concept that would have buyers believe that there is an average or ideal size among men and women ... Those who market 'one size fits all' products suggest that if the article of clothing is not a good fit, the fault is not with the design of the garment, but with those who are too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short, or too high-waisted".* [6]

Alison Jones' work comparing Pälangi and 'Pacific' female students in a secondary school in Auckland city puts the notion of disruption or exclusion in the following way:

> *"School success is not a result of cultural differences as such, but is a result of the way in which schools unconsciously make familiarity with the dominant culture a prerequisite for school success ... The values, ideas, ways of thinking and acting which children in dominant groups learn through their socialisation in the family are converted into valuable school credentials by the school".*[7]

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Colin Lankshear's work throws further light on exclusionary practices in schooling. He observed that:

> *"The only 'reason' I can see for requiring migrant children to be taught and examined in English is in order to Anglicise, uniformise or domesticate them. This is a political act that disempowers and disadvantages those who are 'other'. It is to privilege sameness over difference. As far as I am concerned, this is to dehumanise others. It also makes a society less interesting to live in."*[8]

It should go without saying that the same assumptions hold for Māori. On these versions of schooling, then, the venerable assumption is that the ways of learning and teaching deemed effective for students familiar with the dominant New Zealand European/Pālangi culture will foster all students' schooling no matter what their language and culture may be. The real significance of this posture, though, has more to do with what it excludes than what it includes. That is, schooling does not simply provide knowledge (meaning accumulated experiences); rather, it dismisses one kind of knowledge for another in the context of a power relationship. Power, in this sense, is almost characterized by what is excluded.

If Maria de la Luz Reyes, Thomas J. Sergiovanni, Alison Jones, Colin Lankshear, and other critical theorists are accurate in their portrait of schooling, then, educational activity has some way to go before the indigenous people can be confident that the prevailing approaches to teaching practice are well-considered and, principals and teachers are able to think beyond the boundaries of "generic teaching methods".[9] The danger for the indigenous students in the preference for the prevailing approaches to teaching practice in secondary schooling is that the ASSPA has come to believe that there is one way of understanding conditions of education, one valid methodology and one valid policy of knowing about how people relate to schooling.

What seems to be happening in the ASSPA is that the principal's lack of conceptual clarity has led to their confused understanding of the term culture. This has influenced how schooling issues, particularly those cultural relations of the indigenous peoples, are approached. By assuming that a fixed and static set of beliefs about language, society, property, government and religion passed on through schooling are shared understandings of

the term, the ASSPA has run the risk of 'talking past' the indigenous peoples without realising it. Thus, a clear distinction needs to be made between the people whose culture is disrupted and those who participate more or less unobstructed in Aotearoa.[10] As previously mentioned, the former group are constituted principally of the indigenous peoples from Aotearoa and Tonga, among other migrants from the Pacific Islands cultural milieu. They are the communities whose position has been established historically through military conquest, or social, or economic, and/or political disruption. The important ideas are that the communities whose specific language and culture are devalued in school are situated in the lowest position in the social, economic and political hierarchy and are severely discriminated against. Those who participate more or less unobstructed would include the professional and managerial middle class, such as the ASSPA, whose English language and its attendant values, ideas, ways of doing things prevail in secondary schooling. This being the case, it is clear that culture symbolises the tenuous relationship the indigenous students have in school. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that the ASSPA plays an active role in shaping what happens in schooling. This means that schooling is not neutral. From this point of view, it appears obvious that the dominant 'culture disrupts schooling' for the indigenous students.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire posits that the anthropological concept of culture is central and indispensable to the education of people in their coming to know about the world.[11] In his view, the concept of culture as an educational theme generates and brings forth peoples' awareness of the world of culture and the many aspects of realities that touch their lives. Freire does not attempt to define culture specifically. The assumption is that he seeks not to limit the frame of discussion by defining culture in some static sense; rather the idea is to allow people to draw upon their own knowledge and experiences as culture that constitutes the way they think, act, and live. For example, it is through dialogue and community participation that the indigenous peoples come to understand how their knowledge and experiences are produced and how to transform the marginalised social, political and economic situations in which they find themselves.

As Freire puts it,

> *"culture clarifies the role of people in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings".*[12]

On Freire's view of culture as transformative action, it would appear that educative practice to mitigate against the beliefs of institutionalised discrimination, marginal status and cultural rupture requires a holistic approach in the class and school. Freire would argue that the beginning for any educative programme is the students' own language and culture. Yet, Freire is well aware that this initial part of a process for establishing an awareness of a person's culture also means that the students are required to learn the language and culture of the school. His work, while not without its flaws, provides important signposts for the indigenous communities seeking to engage in political action for curtailing exclusionary practices. This is the transformation that Paulo Freire wrote of in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* a transformation in educative practice that seeks not only to liberate the oppressed, but the oppressors as well: an empowerment struggle led by a vision of humanity that supports indigeneity and diversity, and increase in power through genuine dialogue and community participation. On this account, it is clear that Paulo Freire's philosophy and practice would provide the indigenous peoples with ways of working against disruptive practices in an effort to go beyond the 'theoretical straitjacket' of cultural and political uniformity.

In drawing a parallel with Freire, an indigenous concept of culture would provide a way of apprehending the world as a process embodying broad vision, wide interests and sufficient ability to carry out many responsibilities in daily practice including producing an understanding of cultural, political, economic and educative activities and, taking action against the oppressive forces of reality. Conceptualising culture in this way means retrieving the 'old' so as to understand what is 'new' and to make changes whenever possible. Indeed, beliefs, customs, traditions, and so forth, differ between the past and present. Old and new ways are lived differently. On this conception, culture refers to the legacies related to the past and is vitally concerned with the present way of living, and the future. More to the point, it is through interweaving the lived realities of ancestors and older adults; and personal

present lived experience that the indigenous peoples acquire understandings of themselves, thereby bringing them authority to critique the disruption of their particular langauge and culture. Conceiving of culture as interweaving the past and present lived experiences means that the indigenous understanding of time is not linear, independent and irreversible; rather, time is understood as part of the entire environment of living, including the future. The perception accentuates that what is required is not further disruption of the indigenous cultural practices but a reconnection of time and people, the inclusion of personal history in influencing the relationship of the students and the teacher, and curricula that connects with the language of the students' lives. The point is to change the artificial linear and fragmented notion of time for the students to make sense of their social and historical situations, to make sense of themselves, and, ultimately, for illuminating the political forces that may impinge upon the possibilities for transformative practice in the class and school.

The imprint of the dominant society and culture, though, is inscribed in a whole range of school practices: The English language, school rules, selection and presentation of school knowledge, classroom social relations, and the exclusion of the indigenous cultures. What is crucial to recognise is that an indigenous concept of culture is an intricate world of knowledge that richly interweaves the English language and its attendant cultural practices with the particular indigenous language and its ensuing values, and so forth. The belief is that cultural understandings are preoccupied within the language a person speaks and in turn, this language extends out of the spirit of a place, out of the people sustaining life. On this belief, language becomes the rallying point for the intercommunication between history, art, music, education, philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, law, politics, healing, care for the environment, spirituality, and so on. This leads to the view that not only is it impossible to separate people from their relationship to language, place, time, politics, wealth, knowledge, technology, nature, religion, spiritual wisdom, and emotion, it is theoretically dishonest. The point is that the indigenous ways of talking do not coincide with the linguistic boundaries of English; rather, the idea is that language conveys a knowledge of people and place. Consequently, learning is never incomprehensible since it is firmly connected with a person's and entire peoples' concrete existence, in their language and beliefs, and a wider sense of

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reality. Still in this view, the indigenous languages of Aotearoa and Tonga, for example, are mutually intelligible and the people still have much in common - words, philosophies, and stories. A common feature of the languages is their holistic and process-view of the complex relationships that exist within the cosmos, nature and society. An important consideration that the ASSPA cannot ignore is that Māori and Tongan people now communicate with each other using the English language with all its cultural problems for conveying meanings arising out their specific settings. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that language is at the heart of culture.

Regardless of the extent of contact with the dominant culture, though, the indigenous peoples through their personal experiences are aware and insistent about their own ways of communicating and interacting. The communities are deeply aware of the necessity for schooling that incorporates and stresses their apprehension of their intimate situation. The language of schooling, testing, credentials, remediation, and so forth should always be the language in which possibilities for success are greatest and/or in which the students feels most at home. The point being made is that it does not make sense to separate people and place, language and culture, and educational activities into speaking, reading, and writing. The aspiration of the people cannot be to learn in a classroom that produces students who could lose their vitality grounded in their own cultural identity, and provide them with a way of knowing associated only with the prevailing society and culture. To approach schooling in this way would be to disrupt their learning in both their own and the dominant culture. What is required instead is a devotion to schooling where Māori and Tongan people, for example, will have their experiences, values, and ways of communicating reflected alongside the officially sanctioned view in the educational environment.

The critical issue is that the indigenous experiences contribute valuable insights and different viewpoints from which to draw upon during schooling. Most important, culture's dynamic constitution and its relationship with schooling are both emphasized in an indigenous cultural concept. That is, the concept signals a dynamic process where teaching, learning and the place of learning and teaching are all interconnected, familiar and affirming for the students.

Stated in a different way, the ideas for an indigenous concept of culture are neither conceived nor set in motion in a vacuum; and that culture is neither lifeless nor fixed.

Of course, how the following generation makes sense of the world will not be the same as for their parents or their grandparents. Their experiences, their view, their way of understanding and acting the world will be different. So, what is passed on to succeeding generations may not be the same. It would seem reasonable to say, though, that so long as the ASSPA perpetuates only the English language, envisions reality as linear, and conceives of time as an independent element that can be manipulated to improve contact time between the students and the teacher and, convey a smooth-running operation of specific prescriptions and methodologies, among other educational outcomes then schooling for the indigenous students will continue to be a disruptive force upon them. No matter how well a school is organised, the unexpected and unpredictable take place daily. In the complexity of cultural issues, the ASSPA ought to begin to acknowledge the reality of tensions that result from different languages, interests, values, and practices, from privilege, oppression, and power as they are lived by principals, teachers and the indigenous students in class and school. It would seem obvious that the process requires taking into account a dialogue between cultures.

A Dialogue between cultures: Pō Talanoa

According to the report in the *Central Leader* :

> *"the Auckland secondary school principals say students spent too much class time practising for cultural performances"*.[13]

Because of their cultural and political supremacy and economic prosperity, the ASSPA has gone on blissfully responding in pessimistic ways to the ASB Festival held each March in the city of Auckland. It is not proposed here that the students stop attending the Festival; rather, the belief is that they should have access to events that offer programmes for their particular culture. Such programmes enrich the students' lives and provide a deeper meaning to all knowledge.

From a Tongan point of view, the Festival is probably the only event held in secondary

schools when Tongan students, their parents and the wider Tongan community come together with the ASSPA and teachers for six weeks every year. It is also the setting in which Tongan people experience living at the interface of many cultures; that is the school, the ASSPA, Māori and Tongan communities, among others. This cultural interface necessitates questioning how schooling can be infused with innovative insights, perspectives, philosophies, and approaches through practices that traverse cultural and political relationships. Dialogue needs to be promoted between the indigenous peoples and the school. Forums of broad vision and wide interests that include the indigenous peoples, the principals and teachers, and the Boards of Trustees are required to encourage dialogue between these groups to foster an educative environment that is supportive. What is suggested, then, is expanding the range of languages, perspectives, interests, selection and presentation of knowledge, social relations in the class, and sharing economic resources in school. Unfortunately there is no primrose procedure.

Calling for the inclusion of Tongan interests and values in schooling requires some clarification, for what is required is finance, parental involvement, curriculum reform, cultural diversity and drawing attention to the dialogical and moral aspects in schooling. Dialogical and morally responsive schooling is believed to incorporate warm interpersonal relationships and parents, tutors, students, the principal, and the Board of Trustees talking in a sophisticated and mutually respectful way with each other. In a discussion of the virtuous school, tatala, fakatalatala and mālie are important and complex themes for including Tongan values and experiences of moral authority, for drawing out higher levels of human potential, for sharing values and working together, for empowerment concerned with commitment, duties and obligations, as well as with knowledge. These are the principles of the Pō talanoa framework proposed in this section, and examples are provided of its use in practice.

Cultural diversity and good pedagogy are conceptualized as those relationships produced in innovative and worthwhile learning contexts that are not fixed but are created and recreated as the students and the teacher engage in schooling. The Pō Ako project depicted here was established on the relationships of exhilaration, love and hope experienced by Tongan people

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during the ASB Secondary Schools Māori and Pacific Islands Cultural Festival held in 1991 and 1992. The Tongan parents gratified and empowered by their children's winning performances on stage, now, sought ways to extend the passions and the successes gained in the performing arts to the classroom. For what was well-understood by the parents is that their children's academic success is low and something had to be done to transform the situation. Thus, in 1992, the Tongan community-based homework centre called Pō Ako was established at Mt Roskill Grammar School in Auckland. Pō talanoa is a process of learning that is unique to the Pō Ako and is integral to Tongan people's everyday living. The Pō Ako is a place in which Tongan students talanoa with Tongan tutors about the homework tasks set by the school. It is the place where the students enrich their intimate culture and academic learning by using both Tongan and English language. In turn, talanoa enables Tongan parents to raise personal, political, social and economic matters with Tongan educators, community activists and each other in the pō.

The word pō talanoa is a verb and a noun. The noun pō refers to the night. The verb talanoa means to talk, to tell stories from the past and to relate experiences of daily living. As a noun, talanoa is the talk, the story, or the tale. As an approach to learning, pō talanoa enables Tongan people to unfold insights into schooling as it is practised in Aotearoa. Conceptualising schooling as a cultural and political activity means introducing Tongan language into the learning process whereby Tongan people can connect with the place of their experiences and their relationships to it through dialogue. For example, through talanoa in the pō, stressed parents talk with each other, the principal and the Board of Trustees about their children's schooling. At the heart of pō talanoa is the capacity of Tongan people to relate with each other within a place based on kinship ties, faith, work, familiar experiences, knowledge, and so forth.

The significance of pō talanoa lies in Tongan people's capacity to tatala and fakatalatala critically about the historical, political, educational, philosophical and cultural underpinnings of education in relation to them. The word tatala can allude to a variety of contexts. As a verb, tatala depicts some kind of movement such as to remove, to take off, or to unwrap a

cover surrounding a parcel and to unfold a roll of tapa cloth. Most important, it can mean to open a person's mind, body, and spirit to different viewpoints about some thing. In the latter sense, it could be said that tatala implies a separation of things that are connected by a multiplicity of layers or a network of some thing. In this sense, tatala can mean to unravel the political, social, cultural, philosophical, economic layers or relationships that prevail in school in order to understand how Tongan students accomplish learning or not. In another sense, to tatala can mean to draw together fragmented bits of information in order to create clarity about schooling and culture. It should be noted that the parents bring with them a fragmented and vague perception of schooling and it is through tatala that they can connect and relate the bits of information thereby coming to understand more deeply what is going on in school. That is to say, that an educational issue is best understood when it is queried

The word fakatalatala is produced by the causative prefix faka and by reduplicating the verb tala. Like tatala, fakatalatala alludes to a movement to separate, disentangle, release or detach some thing. Thus, it can be said to mean to unravel, to disentangle, or to separate out some thing. For instance, fakatalatala is useful in creating a sense of working together in a spirit of emergent understanding of the idea that the principal and teachers know what is best for Tongan students in school. No meaningful learning will take place if the process is devoid of context and practice. Consider, for a moment, that the tutors encourage the students to fakatalatala their misunderstandings and confusion about concepts they learn in mathematics in the English language. In the case of a mathematical problem, fakatalatala contributes to clarifying the steps of systematic working in order to foster understanding. By appropriating tatala and fakatalatala, the relationships between ideas and subject content are queried and knowledge is shaped. Conceptualising learning mathematics as a dialogical process means making sure that the students know how to carry out mathematical tasks competently and confidently.

Pō talanoa can be produced not only by the interests of the people but through the mālie (social bonding) they experience when they talk together. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the myriad ways that mālie can be apprehended. It is sufficient to point out

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that in grammatical terms mālie is a verb, a noun, an adverb, and an adjective. It should be emphasized that actions produce mālie since the doers and the actors are forming meaningful and transforming relationships that can only be beneficial and advantageous to them in a 'connected' way, not in any exploitative way. Being connected refers to a holistic relationship between people and place. Since mālie espouses a philosophy of process, energy, and transformation it is central to Tongan people's pursuit of what it means to live life and, living to the fullest potential! As a value, it draws upon Tongan language that provides insights into cultural meanings that the people construct to make sense of the relationships they form with each other and with other people in school. Warm relationships, communication, and the exchange of ideas and experiences are important components in strengthening the people's understandings of how the ASSPA protects and supports the programmes in school, for example. Mālie, then, refers to relationships that Tongan people create when shaping their world view and knowledge. Cordial, tender and joyful relationships are paramount for vibrant communities and the realization of Tongan people's critical education.

By appropriating the principles of po talanoa, the parents discuss the secondary school and its structure, including raising questions about how school structures are not constructed to privilege Tongan students' successful examination participation. Of course, the parents have grasped already that there are subjects called mathematics, science, art, physical education, among others, that are taught in English. They understand that there are examinations and tests throughout the school year. Nonetheless, as the parents' curiosity about schooling intensifies, there are many more serious and recurring themes engaged by them. One theme concerns how and why streaming or tracking that places Tongan students at the bottom of the school hierarchy is constructed. Another theme, is the poor quality of content provided the students in low-stream classes. Further concerns are the poor teaching skills of the teachers who instruct classes in the low-stream and the limited material resources provided the students therein to sustain their learning. They raise questions about how and why significant numbers of Tongan students' potential to succeed on the sport field is denied by the school's decision-makers; rather, the executive's preference, conscious or not, is to

purchase computer technology over equipment to develop a person's fitness and training to excel in rugby and netball. The point is that all of the practices queried by the parents highlight Tongan students' relegation to a site of failure in local and national examinations and, their omission from sport teams in school.

Of course, pō talanoa is more than just talking about the subjects Tongan students are learning and which ones they find difficult. As a theoretical framework, pō talanoa suggests ways to dialogue in a complex way about the philosophical, political and economic forces on schooling. Pō talanoa contributes ways to understand how schooling is socially constructed and structured; how Tongan people are produced, reproduced, and positioned by it. It renders ways to apprehend how the people come to experience schooling. In addition, pō talanoa produces ways of encouraging Tongan parents to speak about and question their relationships with their children, the principal and teachers, the Board of Trustees, the wider schooling structure, and their marginal status in society. It must be reemphasized that pō talanoa that is malie moves Tongan people beyond what they already know. Most important of all, pō talanoa raises and encounters the relation of schooling to the world it inhabits and the relation of the student to his or her community and environment.

Upon reflection, for example, Mt Roskill Grammar School's records for Tongan students showed their academic performance to be poor or below average. However, Pō Ako provides a different view of their academic proficiencies. The *Quality Service Indicator Reports on Homework Centres at Mt Roskill Grammar School*, 1994, 1995 convey a marked difference between the performance of *Tongan* students who attended the *Pō Ako* and those students who did not. The reports express that:

> *"the establishment of the Po Ako gives some students the opportunity to perform exceptionally well and generally those students who attended the Pō Ako did better than expected".*[14]

Consider, also, that the 1994 School Certificate results showed a marked improvement in the

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performance of Tongan students who regularly attended the Pō Ako since 1992. That is, seven Tongan students in Form Three in 1992 passed the National examination in 1994. Out of the forty-one papers 'sat' by the students, they accomplished ten C grade, eight B grade, and three A grade passes. The significance of their academic performance lies in the fact that prior to 1994, no Tongan candidates in the school had obtained an A grade pass in any School Certificate subject.. While the number of papers passed may not be stunning, the combined total of successful passes is the best results for Tongan students for decades. What is notable about the students' success is that the low achievement experienced by Tongan candidates can be changed and that what it takes to begin transformative schooling cannot be the work of one person; rather, the commitment belongs to all of the participants in a programme. Recognition of all these values and examples of practice signal that, as a theory, pō talanoa is dialogical, empowering and, most important, gratifying to Tongan people.

The commitment to changing schooling does not simply happen. The idea of transforming schooling for Tongan students at the Mt Roskill Grammar School is linked to talanoa, tatala, fakatalatala and mālie, and dialogue and warm relationships are linked to hope, and hope is linked to the belief that change is possible and that the parents, the tutors, the students, the principal and the Board of Trustees are all responsible for it. Pō talanoa as a theory embodies the hope that the incompatibility between the culture that prevails in school and the indigenous communities can be swept away by human relationships that are patient, artistic, and active.

The purpose of schooling cannot be to distort, devalue, and disrupt the language and culture of the indigenous students, but to transform it. Finally, the bright side of pō talanoa is that a theory and practice of schooling is emerging that requires the ASSPA to reshape the exclusionary approaches to teaching practice that prevail in the class and school.

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Conclusion

This article has sought to provide innovative perspectives for overcoming the ASSPA's perception of the culture of the indigenous communities as a disruptive force upon their children's schooling. Schooling is a product of culture. In other words, schooling expresses a culture and contributes to constituting and reshaping it. Therefore, like any other human activities, culture and schooling require a critical analysis, not only at the implementation and application stage but also, and more important, at the level of key assumptions and values that oversee their conceptions, practices and production.[15]

The principals' narrow perception of culture make it imperative that the indigenous peoples attach themselves not only to the culture whose power rests on claims of superiority, universality, and ethical neutrality but also to an indigenous concept of culture that links economics, politics, and education. Recognition of the concept and careful consideration of it will make it possible to ensure that the indigenous students will no longer experience cultural rupture in school.

Ultimately, an indigenous critique can influence the indigenous peoples' efforts toward emancipation beyond the present unrelenting disruption of the indigenous cultures by the prevailing society and culture. Imagination that initially inspires a theory for innovative teaching practice can provide approaches for further planning. All this will take generations to achieve – let future generations be proud of the steps the Tongan people took to humanise and revolutionize education in the Pō Ako.

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